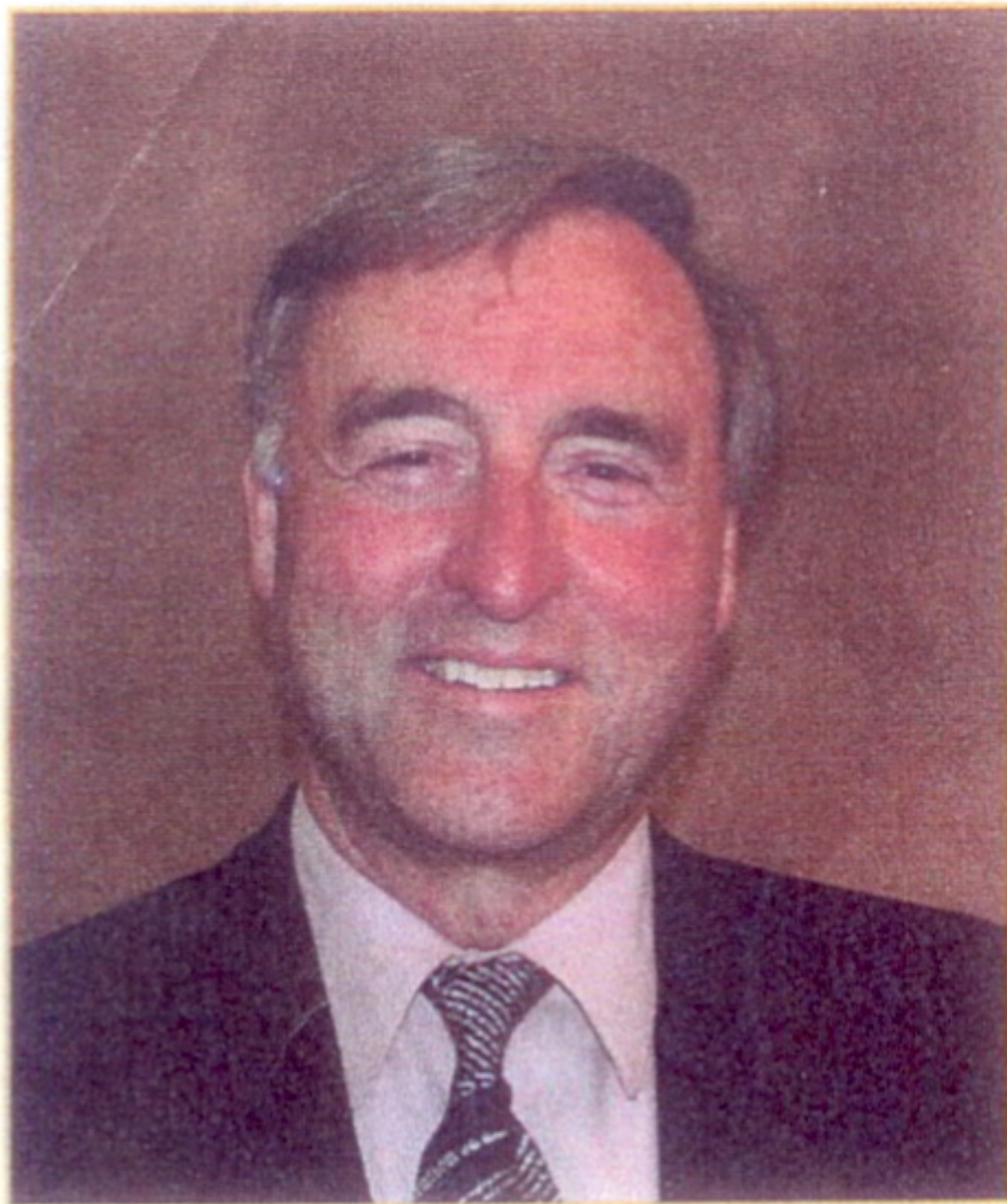


Diversity and Dialogue Mean More Dollars \$\$\$

by Irwin Trester



Let's face it, like it or not California hotels are host to the center of the universe. California is the capital of all Pacific Rim commerce and enterprise and we provide hospitality to guests from all over the world.

Clearly our guest base is a picture of diversity. Our employee base likewise is diverse. So, with diversity in guests and employees, how do we turn such differences into dollars? "Embrace the challenge."

Employee Cultural Diversity

Our national goal remains "**e pluribus unum**" – "**From many, one.**" We still want the melting pot idea to work so that no matter what one's origin, we all become part of our American culture. Likewise, we who are already part of the American culture should still learn about the cultures of the people in the "melting pot."

We are an English-speaking nation and we want to keep it that way. However, we should understand our limited-English speaking employees. Any attempt to learn Spanish, for example, even a few words will be appreciated. I suggest English speakers learn 100 words of "shop Spanish." "Shop Spanish" would be words that are commonly used around the hotel such as, "beds, towels, soap, guests, etc." You can develop this list by working directly with your employees to discover what words the employees use most frequently. These are often different than the dictionary words. Employees often use their own terms to describe items. For example, it is important that managers know the actual terms used for, let's say, a cleaning product. The material safety data sheet may call the product "household cleanser," while the employees may refer to it in Spanish as the "blue powder." In any case, the goal is to know and understand 100 important words that employees use daily on their jobs. While managers and employees are developing a list in Spanish and English, a great deal of interest and understanding can be developed between employees and managers. You will see how appreciative your employees will be when they hear you use the Spanish word or phrase that they know for a particular item and you will be happy to hear them refer to that item in English.

We should also emphasize to our Spanish-speaking employees that their advancement will often depend in part on their ability to understand, read, and write English. Management should be prepared to explain to their Spanish-speaking employees that English as a Second Language classes (ESL) are available at local adult education high schools. You should let them know that you can help them enroll in those classes. At no cost to the hotel, you can have a representative of the adult education ESL program visit you and actually register your employees for these classes. The families are also invited to attend the classes. This includes spouses and children. Depending on the adult school, classes are available days, evenings and weekends. The classes are very inexpensive or are free. You only pay for the school books.

It should be noted that every proposed "amnesty program" that Congress might pass requires that the alien have English education and English proficiency to qualify for legalization. This makes learning English even more a priority through the ESL classes.

If an employee cannot attend classes, the adult education ESL programs can furnish audio or video cassettes or DVDs for distance learning. That way the employee can learn English at home and not pay for expensive distance learning programs that are offered on TV and elsewhere. Also, the adult education school will correct and grade the papers for both in-class and out-of-class students. ESL teachers are often highly qualified and bring great interest to learning English. These classes are not just reading from an English dictionary and then translating. They use a clever language learning technique that makes English learning both fun and interesting.

When English and limited-English speakers learn each other's language and culture, better understanding, mutual respect and acceptance will develop. This is how we build great teams and ultimately make more money.